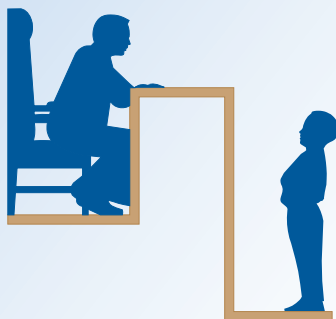


Jury Recommendations

The juvenile has up to six months to successfully complete informal probation and to have the case dismissed. Any previously adjudicated youth who participates in Peer Court for a disposition is eligible to have his/her record sealed after reaching age 18.

Conditions of informal probation may include several of the sanctions listed below:

- Obey curfew
- Pay restitution
- Attend counseling
- Obtain employment
- Attend school regularly
- Perform community service
- Attend Alcoholics Anonymous
- Not possess dangerous weapons
- Participate as a juror in Peer Court
- Interview a victim and write an essay
- Attend alcohol, drug education, property offender, or tobacco class
- Not use or possess controlled substances
- Write a letter of apology or participate in victim-offender mediation
- Not associate in negative peer relationships
- Remain law abiding
- Other conditions imposed by Peer Court Jury and/or Judge



Dakota County Juvenile Peer Court

This Community Justice Program was developed by:

District Court Judge Thomas Poch
and
Dakota County Attorney James C. Backstrom

For more information about
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JUVENILE PEER COURT



Accountability Through Prevention and Education

A Joint Project of:

Judge Thomas Poch
Dakota County District Court

James C. Backstrom
Dakota County Attorney

Dakota County Community Corrections



Mission Statement

The mission of Peer Court is to change illegal activities of juvenile offenders by focusing upon practical and educational experiences for the juveniles and their families in the courtroom, classroom, and at home to teach individual accountability and responsible decision-making for all participants.

What Is Peer Court?

Peer Court is an alternative sentencing program under the authority of District Judge Thomas Poch and Dakota County Attorney James C. Backstrom. Peer Court also involves the Dakota County Community Corrections Department, Dakota County Law Enforcement, and Dakota County School Districts. Peer Court sessions are staffed by volunteer attorneys, probation officers, and by high school students who act as jurors, observers, and court bailiffs. Peer Court is held during the week on local high school campuses. Through participation in Peer Court, juveniles accept responsibility for their behavior. In addition to holding juveniles accountable and educating youth about the legal system, the program provides youth who serve as Peer Court Jurors an opportunity to address the problem of juvenile crime in their community and interact with positive adult role models.



Who Is Eligible For Peer Court?

Juveniles are selected for Peer Court following their arrest, citation or referral to the Dakota County Attorney for charging. Criminal charges may be pending, however, the youth is not considered a threat to public safety. The juveniles must admit guilt and waive their rights to privacy and to an attorney.

- First-time juvenile offenders who commit Disorderly Conduct and other miscellaneous offenses are referred by the County Attorney.
- Juveniles referred to Peer Court for disposition by the Juvenile Court after adjudication.
- Other juveniles who commit offenses on school grounds if requested by school officials and deemed appropriate by the Dakota County Attorney.
- Juvenile offenders who agree to participate as part of school discipline, even if their offense is not chargeable.

What Are The Advantages?

- Processing of cases to insure timely justice.
- Juveniles referred through the program will be held accountable for their behavior through positive peer influences.
- Provides youth with a positive asset building opportunity to assume leadership roles and actively participate in addressing the problem of juvenile crime in their community.
- The juvenile's citation will be dismissed or the juvenile will not be charged after completion of the program so there will not be a court record that the juvenile committed the offense.
- Serves as a constructive educational experience for participants and observers.

How Does It Work?

At the Court hearing, the jurors listen to the charges regarding the juvenile offender. The juveniles are then allowed to explain their side of the story. The student jurors and the judge inquire about the circumstances to determine proper consequences for the illegal behavior.

After questioning is complete, the jury is excused from the courtroom to discuss the offense, consider the juvenile's involvement, and agree upon suitable sanctions. After completing their deliberations, assisted by an attorney advisor to answer any questions, the jurors return to the courtroom and present their sentencing recommendations to the judge. The sentence may be modified by the judge who orders the juvenile to comply with the sentence which includes up to six months of informal probation.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the juvenile offender and his/her parents must sign a Peer Court Agreement which becomes the Court's order in the case. The juvenile's compliance with the Court order is monitored. Juveniles who do not complete their ordered sanctions are referred to the Dakota County Attorney for formal prosecution in Juvenile Court.

A curriculum unit developed by the District Court, Juvenile Court Division, incorporates Peer Court into the classroom. Teacher training sessions are held throughout the year to assist in educating high school students about Juvenile Court and Peer Court.

